

## Disarm

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# Disarm

by [devilspedicure](#)

## Summary

He knows the person lying in the closed casket at the end and middle of the smoky, tired formal room is not Ford. He knows that Ford can still come back. He knows he can still fix everything. And therefore, he cannot bring himself to say goodbye to a man called *Stan Pines*, because that would contradict everything that Stan himself knows, and that would be lying, and Ford would not like that one bit. Ford never liked it when he told lies.

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Stan is contemplating his life at his own funeral when his mother shows up from the other side of the country.

Written for [5SummersofStancest](#). Prompt: A Tight-Knit Family.

## Notes

Sometimes I worry, when I write depressing things like this, if I come across as being against this ship, but trust me, I'm not. I just can't resist the sad.

This work is closely connected to [Don't Speak](#) thematically, and I suggest reading both together for the full effect.

Caryn is awful about everything, from disabilities to medication, to just her general behaviour. Seriously, she sucks. I can't stress that enough.

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

*Culturally, parents, especially mothers, are seen as nurturing, loving and instinctively maternal.*

—

The funeral director sneaks a discreet glance at her wristwatch, then grimaces at Stan like his presence is less of a paying customer and more like a pebble stuck in her shoe. She does not need to say anything. Stan knows. No one is coming.

Not that it ought to come as a surprise, if Stan is being honest with himself. The only people who would be interested in whether or not his heart is still beating are those, who evidently are wise enough to know that they cannot extort money from his charbroiled corpse – that any cash bills, Stan would have had on his person, are wont to have gone up in flames together with the car, he crashed to his death in. Stan offers the woman a grimace with a different flavor base in return and shakes his head.

She clears her throat, keeping her words low and respectful, albeit loud enough for Stan to hear her from the third row of open folding chairs. “Do you... Want to say something? For the deceased?”

He waves a hand at her.

“Nah, that’s alright. He was kind of an ass when he was alive, and I don’t think he has any use for me waxing poetic about him wherever he—... Uh.” Stan forces a shaky scoff to hide the way his stomach flipped. “You know.”

Thankfully, Stan can conclude that the funeral director is professional enough to not comment on the way his voice cracks like a frozen puddle on winter mornings, that she just nods as he wipes his eyes. “Whenever you’re ready, then.”

“Sure.”

He knows the person lying in the closed casket at the end and middle of the smoky, tired formal room is not Ford. He knows that Ford can still come back. He knows he can still fix everything. And therefore, he cannot bring himself to say goodbye to a man called *Stan Pines*, because that would contradict everything that Stan himself knows, and that would be lying, and Ford would not like that one bit. Ford never liked it when he told lies. Still, he cannot make himself get up and get back to open the Murder Hut for business, not yet. It would be weird to call off a funeral service after only, what – he checks his, well, Ford’s, watch – five minutes? Yeah, five minutes. Even if the funeral director accepted his wishes for non-flashy, cheap, just a notice in the paper that Stanley Pines is dead, no invitations sent out, without prejudice, he feels like he would be acting odder than the outliers of what she has seen. Which he has no interest in for the time being.

So instead, he folds his hands and looks at them, avoiding the gaze of the woman standing respectfully to the side of the cheap pine tree box, dressed in gray to blend in and be distantly approachable. He forces himself to focus. His hands. They seem so small out in the open

without Ford's hand-knit mittens and the extra middle finger that Stan taxidermied with a pipe cleaner cut in two and bundled up paper towels. No one in the funeral home needs to check that Stanford Pines has six fingers on each hand, so Stan just never bothered to wear them or change his voice around them as he was making his arrangements. They just took his – Ford's – money and professionally arranged the last goodbye for a body that nobody will miss, falsely believing it used to contain a soul that nobody will miss either. Stan owes it to them to stay, to show appreciation for their lack of questions. He begins to count down the seconds, starting at two thousand.

The chair next to him suddenly creaks, and the yelp he lets out could wake the dead. Heart hammering, he snaps his head back up to take in the woman next to him, dressed in an emerald coat with leopard trim that she has pulled tightly around her thin frame. Her dark hair is streaked with silver, styled in an old-fashioned beehive hairdo, and the blue makeup on her eyelids is splotchy with lack of precision work. Her neck has become that of an aging woman, the skin wrinkled like a turtle's, and the lit cigarette that she holds between her index and middle finger points to a general habit that could partly explain how old she looks despite her birth year.

But her nose is still the same as it was when she was young. Stan used to wish he had inherited that nose instead.

"Well, aren't you going to greet your mother?" she asks, facing forwards towards what is supposed to be her other son with little astonishment, and Stan swallows glass shards.

"Ma." He wants to pinch himself – whether it is to wake himself up or confirm that it is not a dream, he is not really sure of. "What are you doing here?"

She turns to look at him, frowning furrows into her forehead, her red lips curled in displeasure.

"What I said I would in my letter." With an accompanying small huff she rolls her eyes to make a non-spoken point that Stan knows all the words to by heart. "But then I saw the notice in the local paper while I was having a cup of coffee, and I figured I might as well join you," she gestures towards the middle of the room, "and your brother here."

"Right." Stan forces a smile that feels like the pinnacle of dishonesty. Fitting for the audience of the afternoon. "My brother."

His mother leans back in her seat, tilting her head to one side, then the other, like a dog, makes a point of smoking a long inhalation, and blows out the smoke with a tut. "Well there's no room next to your father, so I hope you have a plan for the body. Or ashes." She casts a glance at him. "I really do hope you picked cremation, a full body is such a hassle to dispose of."

Stan's heart sinks, a lake of black ice waiting for him right where his stomach should be. "My... What? No room next to... What do you mean?"

"Your father," his mother over enunciates slowly. "Filbrick Pines. The man who raised you and paid for your college education and who was put in the ground next to your

grandparents.” She gives Stan another side-eye and scoffs, “Not that you were around to bear witness to that.”

“Pa’s dead?”

Caryn sighs, then takes another long drag of her cigarette. Stan can only watch the ash tail grow, stuck in the sticky limbo between past and future, where his father is both a presence in the world and not. Then she leans back her head and blows out the smoke slowly through her nose, only opening her mouth at the very end of her breath.

“I always supposed that since you didn’t show up for the funeral, you were busy having your streak of rebellion, but to imagine that you’d continue this game here and now, to my face, is very disappointing. More so than the fact that you never cared to tell us about all your uppity grant money, even though we are your parents, and you very much owed it to us after that school disaster that ended up costing your father the better life he was promised.”

She regains her composure, and it is like watching a marionette being pulled by strings, takes a critical glance at her sputtering cigarette stump and sucks in the last few millimeters’ worth of nicotine. Stan’s hands are colder than the dead in his lap.

“His things are being unloaded in front of your house as we’re speaking, by the way. You’re welcome.”

“I don’t—...” Stan closes his eyes, taking a deep breath into his starving lungs. He has not smoked for the good portion of a year now, foregoing cigarettes as a fiscal necessity rather than a choice, but even on his first day of being too poor for Camel’s, he never wanted a pack as much as he does now. His heart is covered in inwards-facing icicles, sharp and blinking in winter sunlight. “Alright. I’ll look through it.”

“You better not throw anything out,” Caryn says as she flicks the dead butt towards the casket by use of her long, red index finger. “It’s not yours to pick and choose from.”

Thoughtlessness, Stan’s demons whisper. Just that. The fabric of the shirt he stole from the town’s charity shop is itchy and makes him sweat.

“Remind me, is there any chance it’s...” He wets his lips, then bites at them for distraction. “Hereditary?”

“Hm?”

He gestures with his shoulder in the false hope that it conveys the sentence stuck behind his teeth. His mother does not answer. He forces it out.

“The thing that offed Pa.”

“Oh.” Caryn crosses her arms to underline the offense in her tone. “Why would I know?”

Stan attempts a shrug with his neck muscles only. “Could be they said something.”

“Well, Stanford,” Stan could swear that she puts a whine into the way she pronounces Ford’s name, “I don’t rightfully know, because I’m not a doctor. It’s bowel cancer, not retardation.”

“Got it,” he answers under his breath, fixating on a spot on the wall above the casket. “Don’t get bowel cancer,” he reprimands with a frown and a deepening to his voice, directed at the two people who could be in there, but neither of who is.

“Hmph.” He can feel the way his mother’s eyes are now boring into his cheek, disapproving of her son’s humor. A few heartbeats pass that he only knows the value of once she asks, “Why haven’t you come up with a medication for cancer yet?”

Stan flexes his fingers. “Don’t you mean a cure?”

“Ha! No.” Caryn shakes her head. “If you cure people, they only need one of what you’re selling, and eventually, no one will need you anymore. What you want is something that helps just enough that people desperately depend on it, but you don’t want them to do so well that they don’t need it anymore. Barbara’s son – you know him, Henry, he went to school with you–”

“That he sure did,” Stan mumbles with the bitterness of memory on his tongue.

“–is working for that company that makes insulin for diabetics, and they’re projected to do very, very well in the coming years. Because people will live, but they’ll live thanks to what Barbara’s son Henry is selling them, and now he’s buying her a house in that new, fancy neighborhood they’re building North of Glass Shard Beach where the current keeps all the spillage from the waste management facility away.” She scoffs. “Do you think he’d do half that well if he did charity work and just cured them instead?”

It takes everything in Stan not to look at her right at that moment. He knows he will lose the fight.

“Sounds great.”

“Does it now?” Her words are acid and Stan regrets ever coming into the world. “Well, then I just have to wonder why *I’m* not the one getting a house in New Jersey, but instead I have to move halfway across the country because your father’s life insurance payout wasn’t enough to even stay in my own home, but instead, I have to move in with your big brother and his wife and look after their kid. Me, a live-in nanny, at my age.” She pauses, but not for lack of words. Then spits with the precision of a predator, “Because of you and your selfishness.”

“Mhmm.” Stan has noticed a scratch in the wood varnish on the back of the chair in front of him and is currently trying to decide if it would be better to expand on it in the sword or machine gun direction. His mother draws the largest, heaviest breath he has heard in a long time. Silence grows between them like a tumor, until Caryn finally uncrosses her arms and places her hands on her knees.

“Well, I hope you’re happy.”

Stan is torn from his imaginary design of a gatling gun that shoots swords. “What?”

“You got what you wanted, didn’t you?” She gestures to the room around them. “Big shot who never cared to come home for Hanukkah or birthdays, just holing himself up with everything that was handed to him. And now you get to keep it, I suppose.”

“Ma.” He tries to keep his voice low and respectful of the funeral director, who has been standing faithfully in her corner and making a great show out of not paying attention to the tense conversation within her earshot. “My brother is *right there*,” he points a shaky finger to the innocent wooden box in front of them, heat building inside him until he spits the last word, “and you think I’m *happy*?”

Caryn looks at him, and his world is a snowglobe being dropped on tiles. Her eyes are still dark, darker than coffee and the night sky, and no amount of crow’s feet could change how little they still make him feel.

“I lost my husband, Stanford. The man who met me during his deployment in the war when I was just a big girl with a heart full of dreams. Who brought me back with him to America when my hometown was wrecked by the war and he found out that I got pregnant with your big brother, and who married me on the spot as soon as I sat foot on American soil. We had *nothing*,” she says the word with her tongue pressed tightly against her front teeth, “and yet he provided for Sherman and me, and we were happy. Things were good. Then,” she sighs, “after almost ten years of happiness and being careful, I got pregnant again. With you. And you turned out to bring company.”

Stan is surprised he can even still pick out her words through the whooshing in his ears from his blood rushing in his veins, a child’s fear of his parents’ anger.

“Do you know what that did to us, not one extra mouth to feed but *two*? What that did to your father? I watched that man work himself to death in his shop just to give you a good start in life, and yet you never thanked us, you never cared to repay us for all we did for you, and now the man that I loved is gone. You want to compare *that*,” she jerks her head in the direction of the casket, “to what your father and I had? Huh?”

Stan can feel himself shrinking, ancient, umbilical fear permeating his bones as he realizes he is falling through dark water.

“You want to compare that—... That *ugliness*, that—” she stalls, stutters, and sucks air in through her nose, “the *things* you did to each other, that *pure perversion* that we heard and felt seeping through the walls and turning everything nasty and sick in our home, you—... You want to compare that to the love and respect I felt for your father?”

He bends his neck, submissive and full of cold, passive shame. He should be horrified, terrified, making a survival instinctual run for the door, but the truth is that does not even care if he has just been hit with the proverbial icy truth of his parents knowing what he and Ford did at night, desperate for touches and release and a sense of being the focus of someone else’s entire attention. “No.”

“It was *sick*, Stanford. Sick and wrong, and we had to live in it.”

He remembers it, too, now. He remembers the way Ford's skin felt under his fingertips after a whole July day spent at the beach, not having showered off the sweat because it cost money and if they wanted to wash, the ocean was free and healthy in the summer. He remembers how it would start, with one of them complaining that their father was being unfair, and the other replying that he could not wait to get out of there, away from home. How Stan, always Stan, would correct it to *them* getting out, and then Ford would weave his fingers into Stan's hair and pull his mouth close enough to bite and lick his tongue.

Stan remembers that first time they went for more than trying to feed each other's gaping hunger by toothy attempts at kissing alone. He remembers finding Ford's chest, stripped of his button-down, newly familiar with the concept of (a girl's) nipples, remembers rubbing his thumbs over the same two soft nubs on his brother's body. He will never, ever forget how Ford moaning in surprise at the touch sounded.

He also remembers, from later that year, the feeling of Ford's cock inside him, the burning sensation that felt so different from having it in his hand or inside his mouth, remembers thinking that it was a mistake, but then Ford had leaned in over him and kissed him on the lips, a touch that was softer than what clouds looked like, and that was the first time in Stan's life that he felt a personal connection to the word *whole*.

"I'm sorry," he says, quietly.

"You should be," Caryn answers. "The stress and shame was probably, most likely, what killed your father in the end."

She stands up, brushing cigarette ash off of her skirt, and hoists her shoulder bag further up her arm. When Stan does not do anything, she huffs, "You could at least walk me to the door, Stanford."

He could say no. He could tell her to go fuck herself, drive off a cliff and into the Pacific Ocean, that she should under absolutely no circumstances be left alone with his nephew, that she will ruin that child just how she ruined her own children, and that it boggles his mind to unfathomable degrees that Shermie even agreed to let their mother put her evil, bony, well-manicured hands on his son, but he does not. It is just not worth it.

And the thing is that Shermie took the phone call from Stan pretending to be Ford pretending that Stan was dead very well. He expressed the exact amount of condolence to be considered tactful, Stan made a nervous joke about the military having filed his big brother's roundness into acute corners, and Shermie thanked him for the message, offered him all his sympathy and his best wishes, and ended the call with the intonation of a man who did not intend to visit his little brother.

So Stan shoves his hands in the pockets of his pants and stands up, throwing a nod to the world's most polite funeral director to take the casket out and send it for cremation, and then he walks behind his mother down the worn carpet of the room. She never turns around to tell her son goodbye, not even though Stan knows she can hear the sound of the casket being moved.



The weather outside the semi-dark funeral home is freezing, the sky gray and dull, hiding a weakened winter sun, and Caryn pulls her green coat closer, as if trying to make it consciously hold her. It looks paler, more worn in the sickly daylight.

“Well,” she says, “now you’ll get the pleasure of finding out first hand how everything will just get worse from here on out. So many things you could have said or done, so many memories that are just yours now.” She is looking up, squinting, as if speaking to the clouds above their heads. “People love to say that funerals are good, that they offer some sort of closure, that you get to say goodbye to that person, but they’re lying. There’s no closure and no amount of reminiscing and crying will change the fact that my husband is dead, and everything is just worse now.”

She turns to face Stan, frowning still, and the set of wrinkles between her eyebrows that she told him came when she had twins is so much deeper than it used to be when he was a child. “Do your family one single favor, Stanford. Find a girl and settle down. It’s not too late. Maybe your son can be the one that’ll actually earn this family the millions you ended up costing us.”

She then turns back towards the road and huffs, shoving her hands down her pockets. Her words are casual, unfitting for their message. “Or at least it would make up for all the atrocities you committed with your own brother under your father’s roof.”

Stan watches her walk down the few steps of the funeral home, then turn left and get into the passenger side of a large moving van. He watches her close the door and buckle up, then watches the flicker of a small flame through the greasy window as she lights a cigarette.

There are more words that he could say to her than there are grains of sand on a beach full of broken bottles. That he is sorry. That he regrets everything. Was it really his fault that his father died? Was the things he did with Ford the reason why he was thrown out so quickly, even though it finally felt like his father began tolerating him because of his boxing? Could he have done anything different?

Could he still have had his family?

He sniffs and wipes at his eye, then realizes that his hands are bare. That he forgot to do Ford’s deep baritone.

The moving van sputters into action, blinks out of the parking lot.

His mother did not notice.

He watches her drive off and it feels like—

“Excuse me? Is this the funeral for Stanley Pines?”

“What?”

The man in front of Stan is not someone he has ever seen before. Or at least Stan thinks so. He is as generic as a middle-aged man can be, dressed in a beige, unassuming suit and

rimmed glasses. Mousy brown hair. Bald spot.

Could either be a teacher, an employee of the funeral home, or an assassin sent by someone who is very pissed to be left with debt unpaid.

“Stanley Pines?”

“Uh,” Stan shoves his hands back down into his pockets by instinct. “Yeah, it is. But, uh, the thing is, you just missed it. They’re carrying the casket out now.”

“Ah, well.” The man gives him a slight smile that is entirely void of emotions, good or bad. Stan then notices that he is carrying a briefcase in one of his hands, a slender, brown one. Professional. “Then could I ask you to testify for me that it really was Stanley Pines in that casket and that he is indeed deceased?”

Stan frowns, his heart picking up the pace from the steady trot that it kicked into as his mother was leaving. “Why? Who’s asking?”

“Oop, sorry. My head seems to be in the clouds today.” The man chuckles, then reaches inside his suit jacket, and Stan contemplates tackling him to the ground to get a head start for all three seconds that it takes the stranger to pull out a business card. “I’m from the Internal Revenue Services, and we’re very interested in how to…” The corners of his mouth stretch to the side, unbridled uncomfortability painting his face. “*Handle* mister Pines’ account properly.”

“Right.” Stan accepts the card, hoping his fingers are not trembling too hard to hold it. He is not used to playing poker with the government to its face. He clears his throat, not bothering to check the agent’s name. “Well, I assure you, Stan Pines is dead. Very dead. Burnt to a crisp, in fact.”

“Good, good.” Stan sort of wants to feel offended at the choice of words and the thoughtful nodding, but he knows when to not bet a losing hand. “Well, that’s it then. Thank you very much, sir.”

“No problem.”

“Have a great day.”

“Sure, you too.” A frog seems to be stuck in Stan’s throat, but the taxation officer does not notice.

He watches the man leave, walking down the road in the opposite direction of where Stan’s mother went, and feels like he is made of porous glass. Her words about marriage and child rearing ring in his ears in her absence – a chance to start over, try again, undo all the ugliness. Accept that Ford is gone, rewrite the memory of the day that just passed into the casket actually containing Ford’s charred corpse. Stan has done it before, ordered himself to believe a lie in order to survive; for six weeks of his life, he told people that his name was Andrew with so much conviction, it took him the greater part of an evening to snap out of it again

when he was hiding in a motel bathroom, staring at his own face in the mirror and repeating his own name over and over again. Stan, Stanley, Stanford.

He could do it. Shermie could do it. Shermie found a sweet girl and has a kid now. Stan just needs to be an amalgamation of Shermie's personality with Ford's name, and he could fix everything.

He could forget Ford in his bed on school nights, sweating, panting, biting marks into the soft skin on his neck. Forget the hesitation in Ford's breath when he hovered over the hickeys, his hips thrusting his cock in and out of Stan, urgency and need soaking both boys' bodies and their sheets. Forget how he would hold his breath despite the pain and the feeling of being *full* and wait and wish for Ford to whisper those three words, that they were used to telling each other in the daytime with the innocence of siblinghood. For Ford to speak them with the only meaning that he and Stan were never supposed to attribute to them.

Forget the first time Ford said them right there in the musky, moist dark.

Stan shakes his head, the gray and cold of the world returning to him like rolling fog.

"Nah, thank you Ma, but I think this shit ends with me," he says quietly, and the words feel like caterpillars dripping from his lips and onto the pavement. He smiles because it is silly to imagine that they will eventually become butterflies in spring, but, well, it is the day of his funeral, and if a man should be allowed to feel pathetically poetic, it should be in the moment when he is being driven to be cremated.

Stan pulls his hands back out of his pockets and watches the hearse roll out from behind the funeral home. The cheap casket is visible, the curtains pulled from the windows, and Stan puts his index finger to his temple, then salutes at it as it passes him.

"Bye, Ma."

Then he turns around and heads for his car.

## End Notes

Thank you so very much for reading. <3

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